

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7230

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 05869

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GW
SUBJECT: VIEWS OF FINANCE MINISTER LAMBSDORFF ON THE
STATE OF THE BONN COALITION

REF: BONN 5680

SUMMARY: COUNT LAMBSDORFF, WHO IS PROBABLY THE MOST
SIGNIFICANT FREE DEMOCRATIC PARTY (FDP) FIGURE IN THE FRG
AFTER GENSCHER, GAVE THE AMBASSADOR A TROUBLED PICTURE OF
THE PRESENT STATE OF THE FRG COALITION. LAMBSDORFF
IMPLIED THAT IF SCHMIDT'S DIFFICULTIES IN MANAGING HIS
OWN PARTY INCREASE, THE FDP MAY NEED TO REVIEW THE
QUESTION OF STAYING IN COALITION WITH THE SOCIAL DEMO-
CRATS AND LOOK TO A NEW ALLIANCE WITH THE OPPOSITION.
END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE COURSE OF A DISCUSSION WITH THE AMBASSADOR
MARCH 28 ON OTHER SUBJECTS (REFTEL), FRG ECONOMICS
MINISTER AND LEADING FREE DEMOCRATIC PARTY (FDP) FIGURE
GRAF LAMBSDORFF GAVE HIS VIEWS ON THE CURRENT ELECTORAL
OUTLOOK AND OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING THE STATE OF THE
PRESENT BONN COALITION BETWEEN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SPD)
AND THE FDP.

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2. LAMBSDORFF PAINTED A GLOOMY PICTURE OF THE MAJOR
LAND ELECTIONS BETWEEN JUNE AND OCTOBER OF THIS YEAR.
IN TWO OF THEM--HAMBURG AND HESSE--THE FDP IS IN PRE-
CARIOUS SHAPE, AND MAY WIND UP OUT OF ITS PRESENT LOCAL
LAND COALITIONS. IN A THIRD, LOWER SAXONY, THE POLLS
SHOW THE FDP AS KEEPING ITS HEAD WELL ABOVE THE FIVE

PERCENT MARK NEEDED FOR SURVIVAL, BUT THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT HERE, TOO, THE FDP MAY BE OUT OF THE LOCAL COALITION IF THE LEADING PARTY--THE CDU--GETS MORE THAN FIFTY PERCENT OF THE VOTE. IN SUM, ACCORDING TO LAMBS-DORFF, THE SITUATION IS A TENSE ONE FOR THE FDP, ALTHOUGH LAMBSDORFF FORESEES NO IMMEDIATE SHORT-TERM IMPACT ON THE PRESENT COALITION EMERGING FROM THESE ELECTIONS. (LAMBSDORFF DID NOT MENTION THE FOURTH ELECTION, BAVARIA, IN WHICH STRAUSS' CHRISTIAN SOCIALISTS ARE CONSIDERED SURE WINNERS AND WHERE THE FDP IS ALSO IN PRECARIOUS CONDITION.)

3. A SECOND KEY ITEM LAMBSDORFF NOTED ON THE FORTHCOMING POLITICAL CALENDAR CONCERNS THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN MAY 1979. GIVEN PRESENT TRENDS, LAMBSDORFF, LIKE OTHERS, BELIEVES THAT THE CDU/CSU OPPOSITION WILL HAVE THE MAJORITY TO DETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF THESE ELECTIONS, AND THUS TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT PRESIDENT SCHEEL (FDP) WILL BE REELECTED. WITHOUT SPECIFICALLY SPELLING OUT THE LEVERAGE THAT THESE ELECTIONS WILL OFFER TO THE OPPOSITION IN PERSUADING THE FDP TO CHANGE COALITION PARTNERS, LAMBSDORFF NOTED THAT THIS ELECTION WILL HAVE AN IMPACT ON FRG POLITICS.

4. LAMBSDORFF THEN TURNED TO THE MATTER OF THE SCHMIDT COALITION'S NARROW PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY, AND OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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WAY THIS MAJORITY HAS BEEN ERODED TO A HAIR-BREADTH MARGIN BY A FEW SPD "DISSIDENTS" ON SUCH ISSUES AS ANTI-TERRORISM LEGISLATION. LAMBSDORFF SAID THAT AS LONG AS THERE IS A WORKABLE MAJORITY FOR THE PRESENT COALITION, THE FDP WILL CONTINUE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COALITION, EVEN IF THE MAJORITY IS A SMALL ONE. IF, HOWEVER, THE NUMBER OF COALITION DEPUTIES OPPOSING GOVERNMENT POSITIONS INCREASES AND IF THE SPD'S DIFFICULTIES IN MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE GROW, IT WILL BE A DIFFERENT STORY. THE FDP MAY THEN BE PUT IN THE POSITION OF SEEKING ANOTHER PARTNER WITH WHICH IT CAN COOPERATE MORE EFFECTIVELY TO PASS LEGISLATION.

5. SPECULATING FURTHER ON THE MATTER OF COALITION PARTNERS, LAMBSDORFF SAID THAT SCHMIDT REMAINS THE GREATEST ASSET FOR HIS PARTY FROM A COALITION STANDPOINT, AND A MAJOR POLE OF ATTRACTION FOR THE FDP. HE IS POLITICALLY STRONGER THAN HIS PARTY, GAINING VOTES FOR IT, AND HE IS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 05869

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A STRONGER LEADERSHIP FIGURE THAN HELMUT KOHL, HONEST
AND ABLE AS THE LATTER IS.

6. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED LAMBSDORFF ABOUT THE COMPOSITION
OF THE FDP BASED ON AGE, AND WHETHER THIS DOES NOT CREATE
DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE FDP ON THE MATTER OF THE SPD
VERSUS THE OPPOSITION AS A COALITION PARTNER. LAMBSDORFF
NOTED THAT MORE THAN HALF OF TODAY'S FDP HAS JOINED THE
PARTY SINCE 1969, I.E., DURING THE PERIOD THAT THE FDP
AND SPD HAVE BEEN IN COALITION. NONETHELESS, HE STATED
HIS VIEW THAT EVEN THE NEWER, YOUNGER MEMBERS OF HIS
PARTY WOULD BE PREPARED TO SHIFT TO A COALITION WITH THE
PRESENT OPPOSITION IF THE SCHMIDT GOVERNMENT WERE UNABLE
TO MAINTAIN AN ADEQUATE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY TO INSURE
THE PASSAGE OF KEY PROGRAMS.

7. COMMENT: WHILE MUCH OF WHAT LAMBSDORFF SAID IS NOT
NEWS AND REFLECTS INCREASED SPECULATION IN BONN ON THE
POSSIBILITY OF A SWITCH BY THE FDP IN COALITION PARTNERS,
HIS REMARKS ARE A SIGNIFICANT CONFIRMATION OF THE UNREST
UNDERLYING THE SCHMIDT COALITION AT PRESENT.

8. LAMBSDORFF TENDED TO EMPHASIZE MAINTAINING A WORKING
PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY AS THE MAJOR FACTOR IN ANY
THOUGHTS HIS PARTY MIGHT HAVE ON CHANGING COALITION
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PARTNERS. HE THUS DOWNPLAYED WHAT IS CLEARLY AT LEAST

AS IMPORTANT A FACTOR--THE PRECARIOUS POLITICAL OUTLOOK OF THE FDP IN THE FORTHCOMING LAND ELECTIONS. THIS IS AN INTERESTING EMPHASIS, AND PROBABLY INDICATES THE PUBLIC LINE THE FDP WOULD TAKE IF IT INDEED DECIDED TO SEEK TO CHANGE COALITION PARTNERS, THEREBY BRINGING A NEW GOVERNMENT INTO OFFICE IN BONN.

9. AT PRESENT, MOST OBSERVERS WOULD PLACE THEIR BETS ON THE PRESENT COALITION REMAINING IN OFFICE THROUGH 1980, WHEN THE NEXT NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY (BUNDESTAG) ELECTIONS TAKE PLACE. AS LAMBSDORFF'S REMARKS CONFIRM, HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT A FOREGONE CONCLUSION, AND THE STATE ELECTIONS IN THE JUNE-OCTOBER PERIOD WILL BE OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF THE SCHMIDT GOVERNMENT. END COMMENT.
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